

VZCZCXRO7951

PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHRL #0759/01 1751417
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241417Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BERLIN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4429
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNFRG/FRG COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 000759

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: GERMANY'S LEFT PARTY CONTINUES TO MARGINALIZE
ITSELF WITH EXTREME POSITIONS ON FOREIGN POLICY AND THE
ECONOMY

Classified By: Acting Political Section Chief William Moeller for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Germany's radical Left Party launched its electoral campaign manifesto at its June 20-21 national party convention in Berlin with a palette of predictable pacifist foreign policy and anti-capitalist domestic appeals that almost guarantee it will continue to remain on the political sidelines after the election. The party is viewed as a pariah by the four other major national parties and has almost no chance of being invited to join any of the possible coalitions. Its platform calls for the dissolution of NATO and its replacement with a new European security structure that includes Russia, and the end of all foreign deployments of Germany's military forces, including in Afghanistan. On domestic issues, it is campaigning on a anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist platform, calling for a minimum wage of 10 euros (\$14), the abolition of Germany's welfare reforms, a redistribution of wealth from "top to bottom," and the nationalization of the private banking and utility systems. There was a surprising absence of ideological debate in a party cobbled together from disparate elements due to deft preparations and the leadership skills of the Left Party Chairmen Oskar Lafontaine and charismatic Gregor Gysi. END SUMMARY.

LET'S COME TOGETHER RIGHT NOW, IN SWEET HARMONY?

¶2. (C) The Left Party opened its 2009 convention up against the widespread expectation that the party would descend into ideological warfare, laying bare the party's ongoing fissures to the public. The Left's poor results in the EU Parliament elections (7.5 percent), high-level political defections over the party's direction, and its failure to capitalize on Germany's economic and financial malaise in the polls presaged heated debate. But both Left Party Chairmen Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi used the political bully pulpit to enforce strict party unity at the expense of some unhappy party delegates from the communist wing who had pushed for even more radical, anti-capitalist language. The party leadership also avoided exposing divisions between fundamentalists and pragmatists over the party's future course.

A LOOK AT THE LEFT PARTY'S CAMPAIGN MANIFESTO

¶3. (SBU) Lafontaine cast his party as the true protectors of workers, pensioners and social welfare recipients. He called for an increase in welfare payments and the abolition of the Hartz IV welfare system. The party platform includes initiatives for the nationalization of private banks, a standard hourly minimum wage of 10 euros, and a reversal of the decision by conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel's government to extend the retirement age from 65 to 67. In addition, the manifesto calls for annual investments of 100 billion euros (\$139.2 billion) for health care, education, climate protection, and infrastructure and 100 billion euros in annual state spending to help firms develop social and

environmental programs with the aim of creating two million new public sector jobs. On the controversial issue of tax reform, the Left wants a "redistribution from the top to the bottom," including a "millionaire's tax" on private wealth, an inheritance tax, and a stock market turnover tax.

14. (SBU) On foreign and security policy, the Left Party used its party convention to reinforce its reputation as Germany's anti-war party. The platform calls for the withdrawal of all German military forces from Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world and the abolition of NATO in favor of a collective European security system which includes Russia. While earning great applause from conference delegates, these positions make it difficult for other parties to even consider a coalition agreement with the Left Party in the near future. The Left Party's Head of International Relations and future MEP, Helmut Scholz, told PolOffs that these measures, especially the withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan, were very popular with the party base. The Left Party's Vice-Chairman and Minister-President candidate for Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, told PolOffs that the Left's anti-war/peace message would feature at the very top of the party's electoral campaign.

KEPT AT ARM'S LENGTH

15. (SBU) The Left Party is not viewed as a viable coalition partner by any of the other parties, including the SPD. Lafontaine expressed his frustration at the convention, noting: "We are not refusing to cooperate in government. It is the SPD which made the foolish decision not to cooperate with us and in so doing threw its own party program in the

BERLIN 00000759 002 OF 002

rubbish bin." SPD Chairman Franz Muentefering, speaking in Munich, stressed that there is no way his party will form a national coalition with them (the Left Party). "Whoever votes for the Left must know that it is for the opposition," he said. The SPD ruled out a coalition with the Left Party mainly because of its hard-line foreign policy calling for Germany to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and for the creation of a European security system that includes Russia and replaces NATO. Absent any obvious political allies in Germany's political landscape, the Left Party can only hope that a strong result in September can prevent a center-right CDU/CSU-FDP coalition or a repeat of the "Grand Coalition."

COMMENT

16. (C) The Left Party and its leadership may have checked political dissension in the ranks for the time being -- at least until the parliamentary elections -- but the question is for how long? Andre Brink, a disgruntled member of the pragmatists in the Left Party, told the leftist TAZ newspaper that the party would remain "dominated by ideologues (fundamentalists) who do not know how to formulate policy and by reformers (pragmatists) who cannot think strategically at party conferences." Left Party pragmatists criticize Oskar Lafontaine's cult of personality but know that attacking him is akin to committing political suicide. Despite the Left Party's projection of unity after the party's convention, it remains deeply divided. The Party's inability to capitalize in the polls from Germany's economic malaise suggests the party has been unsuccessful -- to the great surprise of political analysts -- in finding a formula for addressing the needs of its constituencies. The Left Party temporarily closed a few political wounds at the conference, but that unity is likely to be short-lived.
Koenig